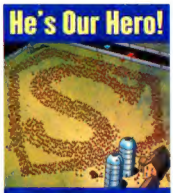
DC

BUSIEK • NICIEZA • WOODS

843
NOV '06

ACTION COMICS



He's Our Hero!

Entire Ohio Town Forms Human "S" That Can Be SEEN FROM SPACE!

SUPERMAN TO ALIENS:

WE'LL SMACK YOU UP!

WHERE'S WALDO?
Pictured: Superman, Live Wire, Nightwing, uh...

Man of Steel, Other Heroes, Defend Earth

Proves His Bona Fides on Global TV!

HOUSTON – Earth's most powerful telescopes strained to see past the Asteroid Belt, and billions were glued to their television screens, with just one thought: "Go, Superman, go!"

In one corner, wearing chrome-steel and power-blasters, the bad guys: The Auctioneer and his robot (are they even robots?) minions,

[Full Story, p. 3]

Did Gov't Deny Supes Clearance?

WASHINGTON – Did authorities in Washington make it easier for the alien threat to overwhelm us? Did they refuse help from the world's greatest superhero? That's what millions are wondering, as reports surface that Superman offered his help immediately, as soon as the alien robots appeared in our skies -- and generals at the Pentagon turned him down!

Pentagon spokesmen stayed mum, refusing to comment on the allegations for what they termed "security reasons," but this paper has learned that communications were indeed initiated between Superman and the U.S. military, after the aliens' abortive attempt to steal the world-renowned St. Patrick's Cathedral -- and Superman was ordered to stand down.

Why? Because they didn't believe it was him. Because his clearance hadn't been fully vetted yet, since his return. We ask you. Frankly, this paper is shocked at such a cavalier

[See THOSE DUMB FEDS, p. 21]

SHOCKER EXCLUSIVE!

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MOVE, PEOPLE! MOVE!
EIGHT SECONDS! SHUT DOWN THAT POWER CORE --
MAIN SYSTEMS DISABLED. I SEE THE BACKUP FEEDS --
I CAN STILL SEE HIM --
VENT SCANNERS FRIED!
FOUR SECONDS! COME ON, COME ON --
THREE BACKUPS DOWN! THERE'S A FOURTH --
SIX-SECOND CUSHION, SKYROCKET -- AT MOST! SUPERMAN'S POWERLESS, AND IF WE DON'T SHUT DOWN THAT CORE --
-- HE'LL DIE!
THE AUCTIONEER'S PROCESSING CENTER --
The controls for the power-damping grid that's been affecting all of us are on the other side of this core. But the shaft is so deep, the only way to make it through was to jump before they disrupted the core, or it'd start up again by the time I reached it.
They're into the safety cushion.
Three seconds left, max.
Two --

All Out Action
Back in Action Part 3
By Kurt Busiek
script / plot
Fabian Nicieza
plot
Pete Woods
art
Brad Anderson, colorist
Rob Leigh, letterer
cover by Dave Gibbons
colored by Moose Baumann
Nachie Castro, assoc. editor
Matt Idelson, editor
SUPERMAN
created by
Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster
NEW YORK —
The being I think of as the Auctioneer came to Earth tracking something, and stayed to pick up "rarities" to sell.
He "acquired" many of Earth's super-heroes, among other things — but even with much of our power damped, we proved difficult to hold.
And now our efforts to remain free are watched —
OPS? OPS?
I REALIZE IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHETHER THE KRYPTONIAN LIVED OR DIED -- THE PROFIT FROM LICENSING THE VIDFEED IS OURS EITHER WAY --
-- BUT I AM CURIOUS.
HOLD BACK THE FINAL MOMENTS UNTIL MORE BIDS COME IN -- BUT LET ME KNOW, mm?
— around the world —
C'MON! C'MON, SUPES!
— in Washington —
THEY HAD A CUSHION — HAD A CUSHION —
— in outer space —
(...THE DARING KRYPTONIAN MET HIS MATCH? FOUR MORE CREDITS, FOR...)
(HNH?)
(MORE CREDITS, VINU -- NOW!)
— in J.S.A. headquarters —
I'M SHOWING POWER-FLUCTUATIONS IN THE CORE GENERATORS, BUT --
NIGHTWING? TIME...?

TWENTY-THREE SECONDS. NINETEEN WAS THE UPPER LIMIT.
IT'S...WE FAILED...
FWIP
Huh -- ?
WAIT. IN THE CORE -- SOMETHING'S MOVING --
Huh? I DON'T SEE ANYTHING --
NOT A SURPRISE, LIVEWIRE. BLUE JAY'S GOT THE EYESIGHT OF A HUNTING HAWK.
HEY, EVERYONE.
Huh?
SUPERMAN!
Hmm. GOOD TWIST.
PROFITS ON THE COLLECTED EDITION SHOULD BE EXCELLENT.
B-BUT -- IF META-TERRANS REGAIN POWERS, DANGER LEVEL TO OPS IS --
BUT OPS -- BIDS ON THE Q-CRYSTALS ARE STACKING UP. PLEASE ATTEND TO DATAFLOW.

OPS.
YOU HAVE ALL THE RESOURCES OF THE PROCESSING FACILITY AT YOUR DISPOSAL. LET'S NOT OVERDRAMATIZE, SHALL WE?
I WILL, HOWEVER, RETURN IF THE ENTERTAINMENT PROVES TOO MUCH FOR YOU...
There'd been some doubt — among the heroes and around the world — as to whether I was the real Superman.
HMM.
YOU DID IT! YOU'RE BACK! BUT HOW -- ?
That seems…to have been dispelled.
UH, SUPERMAN?
BEFORE, WHEN I SAID IF YOU WERE A FAKE, YOU'RE A GOOD ONE? NOBODY'S THAT GOOD.
WELCOME BACK, BIG GUY.
THANKS, FIRESTORM. I NOTICE YOUR HEAD'S IGNITED AGAIN...
(A GALACTIC BACKWATER... EARTH...OF ALL THE PLACES TO FIND A KRYPTONIAN...)
(AMALAK?)
(AMALAK, WHAT'S WRONG?)
(COME BACK AND DRINK...)
NOT JUST FIRESTORM -- LOOK! I CAN SHRINK DOWN TO BIRD-SIZE AGAIN! YOU TOOK OUT THE FIELD, SUPERMAN -- OUR POWERS ARE ALL BACK!
ACTUALLY, JAY, THEY WERE NEVER GONE.

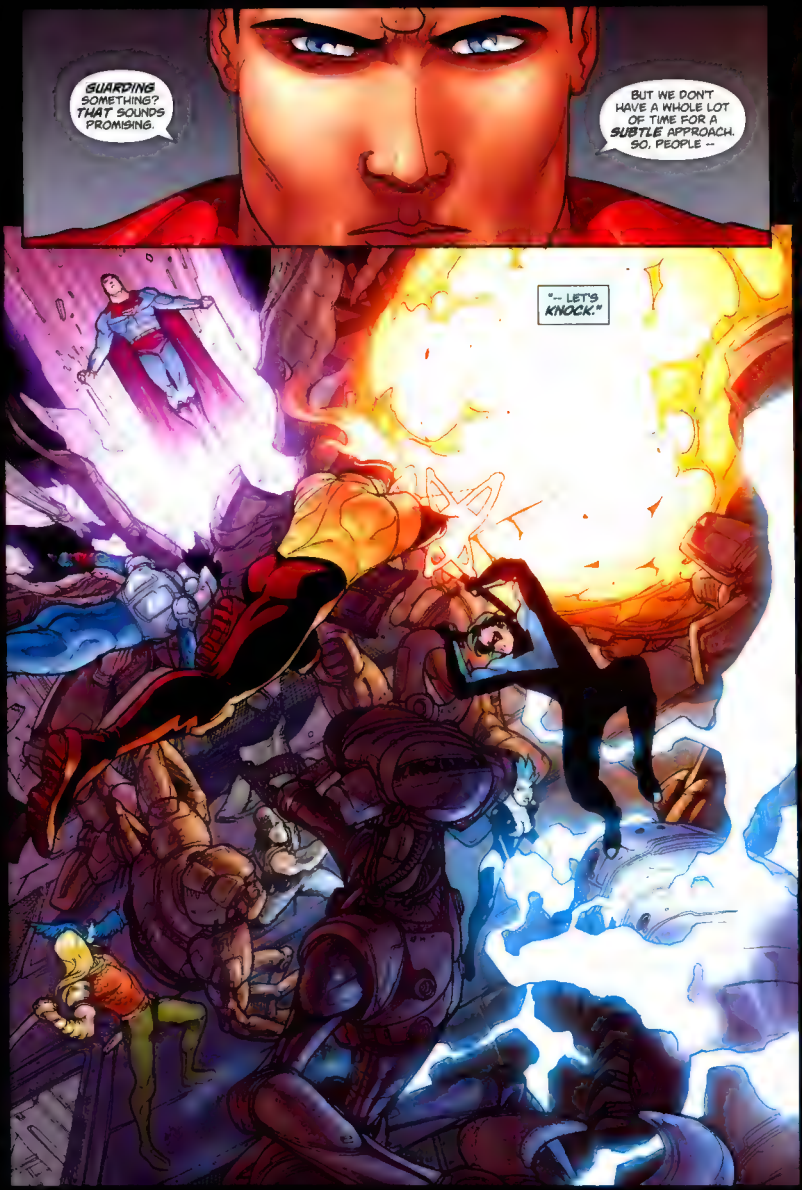
I can hear the robots still pounding on the sealed doors, trying to get at us. But there's a little time…
NEVER GONE? BUT THE DAMPING FIELD --
WAS PSYCHOLOGICAL, VETERAN, NOT PHYSICAL. ALL OUR POWERS COULDN'T BE TAKEN AWAY AT ONCE, NOT BY A SINGLE FIELD --
-- NOT WHEN SOME ARE INBORN, SOME ARE TECHNOLOGICAL, SOME ARE MUTATIONS --
WE MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT THEY WERE GONE, BUT THEY WEREN'T. OF COURSE, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT FOR SURE WHEN I JUMPED --
WELL, I'LL BE.
SO EVEN THOUGH WE FAILED, YOU MADE IT THROUGH THE -- huh?
HKK! GLKK--!
AQUAMAN!
HE'S GOT GILLS! ALL THIS TIME, HE'S BEEN DEHYDRATING, BUT THE DAMPING FIELD SUPPRESSED HIS REACTION!
WE NEED WATER -- !
I SEE SOME.
I've seen worlds with ammonia oceans, or so cold even argon is a liquid. But water's fairly common, if you don't mind odd trace minerals. And more important —
MMMM...
— it works.
FLOOSH

OH, MAN.
MAN, THAT'S BETTER. THAT'LL KEEP ME GOING FOR A WHILE.
DUDE, EWW.
THAT WAS SO --
AH, TEAM --
KRAMM
-- LOOK ALIVE!
THE GUARDS. SIX OR SEVEN, ALL ROBOTS. AND WE CAN USE OUR POWERS THIS TIME. SHALL WE?
SO, LIVEWIRE. ARN GOOD WITH ELECTRONICS?
OH, BABY...
NO. NO NO. NO. BLAM. CRASH. KRONKK.
OPS OBSERVES: IS BAD. IS VERY, VERY BAD...

OKAY. NO REASON TO STICK AROUND HERE.
WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS? SHOULDN'T WE GO BACK AND FREE THEM?
FIRST THINGS FIRST.
WE MAY NEED THEIR POWER, BUT FIRST WE NEED TO KNOW WHERE WE ARE AND WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST. A SMALLER GROUP CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT BETTER.
Mr. Terrific's downloaded schematics point us toward an outside wall. Firestorm, Livewire and I do the power work.
The others hold off interference, until —
CRMPP
UH, SUPERMAN...
OUTER SOLAR SYSTEM, WITHIN SATURN ORBIT —
I'd assumed – they'd come from space, but I'd assumed they must have landed or been in the atmosphere somewhere. But this…
My third thought is that I should have foreseen this. That any alien threat that uses teleportation doesn't need to be on Earth.
My second is that I wish my X-ray vision could have seen through any of these walls.
My first thought, though, is about explosive decompression.

AAAAH!
GOT YOU!
BLUE JAY! SUPERMAN, HE'S --
NO PROBLEM. EVERYONE ELSE ANCHORED?
OH, MAN. SPACE AGAIN...
SKYROCKET, FIRESTORM! IF YOU COULD RIP UP A COUPLE OF DECK PLATES...?
It doesn't take long to seal the hull.
But we still had to find a way out, a way home. And that wasn't all.
THE AUCTIONEER'S STILL ON EARTH. WE'VE GOT TO STOP HIM. FROM HERE, BECAUSE WE'VE GOT NO EASY WAY BACK.
THE ONLY WAY TO DO THAT --
-- IS TO GET HIS ATTENTION!
FADBMMM

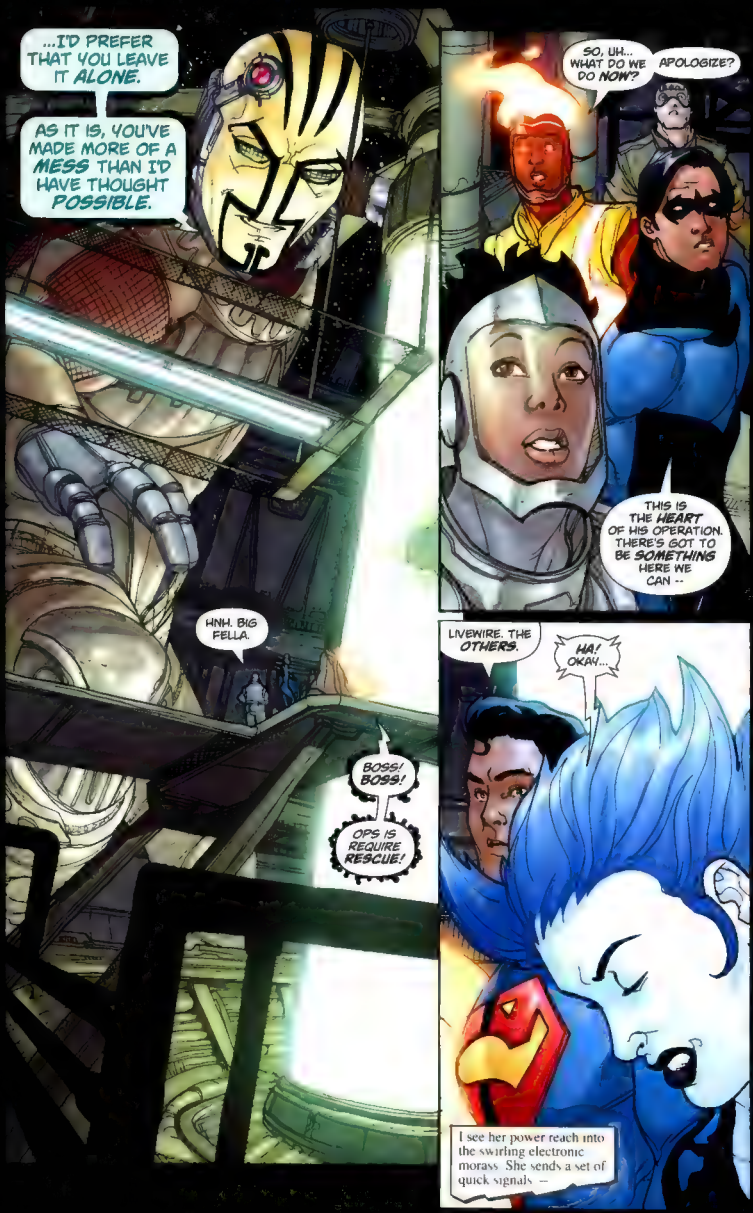
J.S.A. HEADQUARTERS —
Livewire's power over electronic transmissions is what linked us to Earth, even through the power-damping field.
The spillover linked to every TV broadcast on the planet, but the main target was one man...
SUPERMAN?
GOOD IDEA, BAD EXECUTION.
IN A SHIP THAT SIZE, THE EIGHT OF YOU COULD DO THAT FOR SIX DAYS STRAIGHT WITHOUT MAKING MUCH OF A DENT.
YOU'RE GOING TO NEED A MORE IMPORTANT TARGET.
WHERE THEY KEEP THE MOST VALUABLE STORES, MAYBE?
COLLEGE-PROF-TALKING SECOND HEAD ON MY SHOULDER.
I AM SO NOT LOVING THIS.
WE'LL SCOUT AROUND.
I'LL TAKE POINT. I'M USED TO IT. GIVE ME SIXTY METERS AT LEAST, THEN FOLLOW QUIETLY. IF I SEE ANYTHING --
JUST WHISPER. I'LL HEAR YOU.
SOUNDS GOOD.
The ship — or this section of it, at least — was built like a branching tree. Corridors came together into a single hall, which came together with others into another, and so on.
We followed them inward, inward, until —
HEAVY FIREPOWER HERE, SUPERMAN. THE HEAVIEST YET.
LOOKS TO ME LIKE THEY'RE GUARDING SOMETHING...


GUARDING SOMETHING? THAT SOUNDS PROMISING.
BUT WE DON'T HAVE A WHOLE LOT OF TIME FOR A SUBTLE APPROACH. SO, PEOPLE --
"-- LET'S KNOCK."

The battle goes well, and relatively smoothly
SKYROCKET! BEHIND YOU!
DON'T WORRY, SUPERMAN --
-- I GOT IT!
WHOA!
THANKS, AQUAMAN! YOU'RE AS STRONG AS YOUR PREDECESSOR, HUH?
UH, I GUESS SO...!
HUH. I KNEW I WAS STRONG
DIDN'T KNOW I WAS IN THIS LEAGUE, THOUGH...
And while I'm unused to this crew --
KOOM
OKAY -- THAT ONE WASN'T ME, BUT --
IT WAS ME, SUPERMAN. BIG ACCESS PORTS ON THOSE THINGS -- AND THIS LOOKED IMPORTANT...
-- they do get the job done
OKAY, THAT'S -- AAH! AGAIN WITH THE NO WARNING!
I'M TRACKING YOUR POSITION. YOU'RE NOT NEAR ANY STORAGE HOLD, FROM WHAT I CAN TELL.
BUT WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S IMPORTANT. SO...
BUAAWGGG
MAN. WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE TO HAVE HIM IN THE [illegible]...

ALERT! ALERT!
SORRY WE DIDN'T WAIT FOR AN INVITATION, WHATEVER-YOU-ARE --
INCURSION IN OPERATIONS CENTER! INCURSION IN --
AWP! OPS DISCONNECTING FROM MAIN FEEDS! DELIVERY DISRUPTION IMMIN --
-- BUT I THINK WE NEED TO TALK TO YOU.
OPS?
OPS, I'M TRYING TO SCAN A PLANET FOR FURTHER ACQUISITIONS HERE. NOW I'M REGISTERING BID FAILURE, DELIVERY STOPPAGES...
OPS, THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR THIS. COME BACK ONLINE AT ONCE!
LOOKS LIKE WE'VE FOUND SOME SORT OF COMMAND CENTER -- NOT NAVIGATIONAL, THOUGH. BUT WHAT THE HECK IS THAT?
IT APPEARED TO BE IN CHARGE, SO I FIGURED, BEFORE IT ACTIVATED ANY DEFENSES --
UM? PLEASE LET OPS GO NOW?
HNN... HNN...

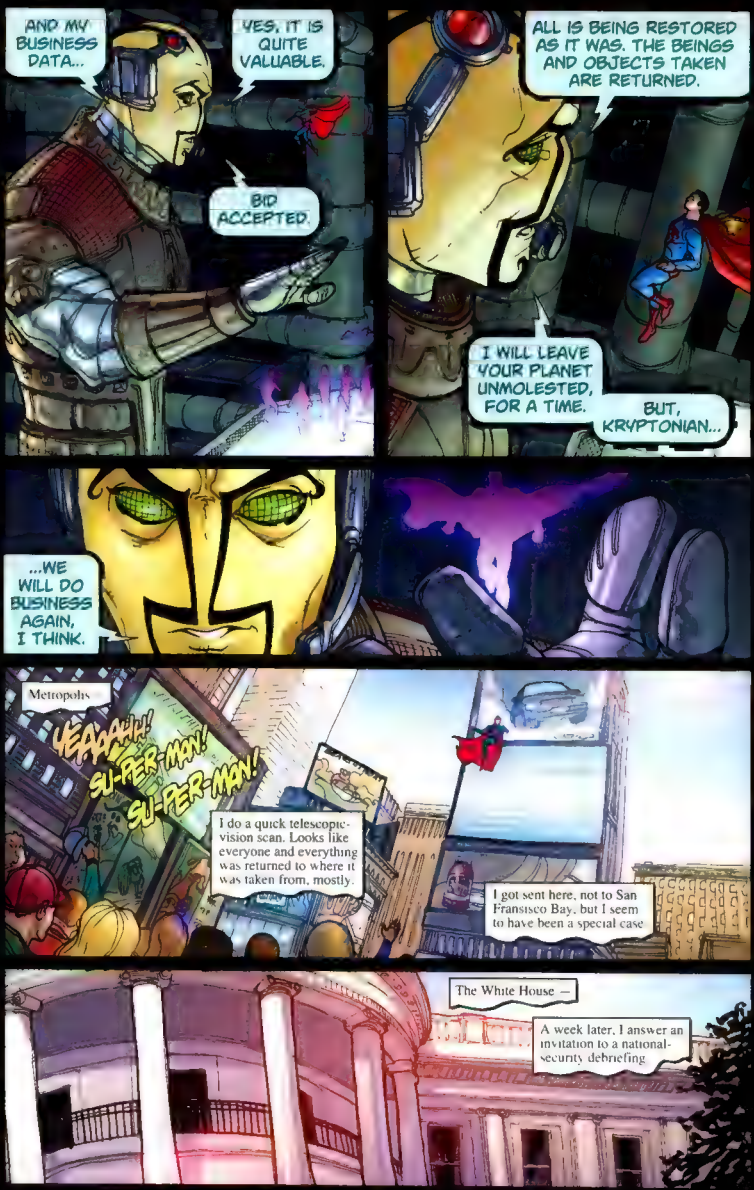
SORRY... SORRY...
TOO MUCH...CAN'T PROCESS...
LIVEWIRE?
THIS CHAMBER'S SEETHING WITH ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSIONS. MILLIONS, MAYBE TRILLIONS. TRY TO CALM DOWN, BLOCK MOST OF THEM OUT...
THIS COLUMN --
-- SOME KIND OF FIBER-OPTIC RELAY?
BUT WITHOUT THE FIBER. LOOK, IT'S ALREADY HEALING, WHERE SUPERMAN SMASHED THROUGH IT --
CAN YOU HANDLE IT, LIVEWIRE? IT'S GOTTA BE TOUGH, I KNOW, BUT WE CAN PULL YOU OUT IF --
NO!
NO...FREAKING... RADIO WAVES...ARE EVER GONNA...GET THE BETTER OF...
HELP HER, SKYROCKET.
I'M STARTING TO GET AN IDEA WHAT THIS PLACE IS, AND WE MAY NEED HER ON TOP OF THINGS.
I'LL TRY.
I'LL DRAIN OFF SOME OF THE --
WOO.
BETTER.
OKAY, OKAY, I GOT IT. IT'S JUST ANOTHER COMM-CENTER. A BIG, COMPLICATED ONE, BUT -- I'VE GOT IT.
WANT ME TO SHUT IT DOWN?
ACTUALLY...


...I'D PREFER THAT YOU LEAVE IT ALONE.
AS IT IS, YOU'VE MADE MORE OF A MESS THAN I'D HAVE THOUGHT POSSIBLE.
HNH. BIG FELLA.
BOSS! BOSS!
OPS IS REQUIRE RESCUE!
SO, UH... WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
APOLOGIZE?
THIS IS THE HEART OF HIS OPERATION. THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHING HERE WE CAN --
LIVEWIRE. THE OTHERS.
HA! OKAY...
I see her power reach into the swirling electronic morass. She sends a set of quick signals --

— and moments later, in the holds —

KRYPTONIAN? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
OPENED NEGOTIATIONS. IF YOU -- WHAT DO I CALL YOU?
YOU CALLED ME "THE AUCTIONEER" BEFORE. I RATHER LIKE THAT. YOU WISH TO BARGAIN?
LET US GO, LEAVE EARTH ALONE -- OR WE BRING THIS SHIP DOWN AROUND YOUR EARS.
I HAVE OTHER SHIPS.
BID REJECTED.
AND IF I START WITH OPS HERE...?
OPS IS A LIVING, THINKING BEING.
I HAVE SCANNED MUCH ABOUT YOU, KRYPTONIAN. I THINK YOU BLUFF.
I look at the others, but they're all looking back up at me. Confident that I'll make the right choice. Do the right thing.
It's flattering to have won that much trust. But when a world depends on you — and you're not sure how to protect it —
SO?
CAN'T HE JUST KILL THE LIGHT THINGIE, AND GET ON WITH IT?
HUH? LADY, SUPERMAN DON'T ROLL LIKE THAT!

SKYROCKET, NIGHTWING. HOW'S LIVEWIRE?
SHE'S HOLDING UP. WHY?
BECAUSE SHE'S GOING TO GET US OUT OF THIS. STILL TAPPED INTO THE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM, LESLIE?
IT'S... BIGGER THAN I THOUGHT... BUT...
YEAH, YEAH, STILL GOT A GRIP ON IT...
PLEASE LET OPS GO NOW?
OPS MAY BE A FORM OF DIGITAL, DATA-PROCESSING LIFE, AUCTIONEER -- BUT LIVEWIRE IS A LIVING, BREATHING TRANSMITTER.
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR ENTIRE DATABASE DISPERSED GALAXY-WIDE?
EVERY CONTACT YOU HAVE, EVERY TRANSACTION YOU'VE MADE, EVERY BLACK MARKET SOURCE, EVERY CLIENT YOU'VE EVER CHEATED...
HEY...HEY, YEAH! I CAN DO THAT! AND I WILL DO THAT, BUSTER, IF YOU DON'T --
HMM.
IMPRESSIVE, KRYPTONIAN. VERY IMPRESSIVE.
I CAME TO THIS PLANET CHASING A SPACESHIP DUE TO LAND HERE, ONE HIDING POTENTIALLY-ENORMOUS VALUE. AND INSTEAD, I FIND WONDERS. AND...
I CHEAT NO ONE. MIND YOU, THAT DOES NOT MEAN THERE ARE NO UNSATISFIED CUSTOMERS WHO COME TO REGRET THE BARGAINS THEY MAKE.


AND MY BUSINESS DATA...
YES, IT IS QUITE VALUABLE.
BID ACCEPTED.
ALL IS BEING RESTORED AS IT WAS. THE BEINGS AND OBJECTS TAKEN ARE RETURNED.
I WILL LEAVE YOUR PLANET UNMOLESTED, FOR A TIME.
BUT, KRYPTONIAN...
...WE WILL DO BUSINESS AGAIN, I THINK.
Metropolis
YEAAAH!!
SU-PER-MAN!
SU-PER-MAN!
I do a quick telescopic-vision scan. Looks like everyone and everything was returned to where it was taken from, mostly.
I got sent here, not to San Fransisco Bay, but I seem to have been a special case
The White House —
A week later, I answer an invitation to a national-security debriefing

-- FEW VILLAINS UNACCOUNTED FOR, WHO ESCAPED IN THE CONFUSION.
THE J.S.A. WILL MAKE THEM A PRIORITY.
THEN IT'S ALL WORKED OUT.
YES. BUT IT MIGHT HAVE GONE BETTER IF WE HAD BETTER COORDINATION.
IF ALLOWING YOU TO RUN TESTS ON ME WILL RESTORE TRUST BETWEEN US --
SUPERMAN, THAT'S EXTRAORDINARILY GENEROUS OF YOU --
FINALLY! WE'LL REALLY BE ABLE TO DIG INTO THIS GUY, SEE WHAT MAKES HIM --
GENTLEMEN.
NO TESTS WILL BE NECESSARY, GENTLEMEN. HE'S MORE THAN PROVED HIMSELF.
GOOD TO SEE YOU, SUPERMAN.
THANKS, MR. PRESIDENT.
Metropolis —
NEWS
THE REAL STEEL DEAL
BY LOIS LANE
I'M GLAD YOU GOT YOUR COVER STORY, LOIS.

YEAH, YEAH. FAME. FORTUNE. CAREER. AWARDS. WHOO. I GOT TO WRITE THE RIGHT STORY, AT LEAST.
YOU'RE BACK. FOR REAL. AND YOU'VE PROVED IT TO THE WORLD.
THERE'S THAT, ALL RIGHT.
SOMETHING STILL BUGGING YOU, HONEY? IT ALL WORKED OUT --
TWO THINGS THE AUCTIONEER SAID.
HE SAID THERE WAS A THIRD KRYPTONIAN ON EARTH, ASIDE FROM ME AND SUPERGIRL. I'LL HAVE TO LOOK INTO THAT.
AND HE SAID HE'D COME BECAUSE OF A SHIP --
"-- A SHIP THAT MAY BE CARRYING SOMETHING OF ENORMOUS VALUE. IF THAT SHIP'S STILL COMING...
"...WHAT HAPPENS WHEN IT GETS HERE...?"
NEXT: EARTHFALL!
JOHNS! DONNER! KUBERT! BE HERE!

52 2THECOMIC.COM
FOR SPECIAL NEWS, DOWNLOADS, SURPRISES!

Now where were we? That's right, we were in the middle of visiting with Editorial when we were interrupted by lack of column space. Well, since this is a new week and I have 400 new words to play with, let's continue…

We left off with **Joey Cavalieri** and should go next door to Senior Editor **Peter Tomasi**, but before we do, we'll pop across the hall to get our daily fix of candy treats from the shared office of Associate Editor **Tom Palmer Jr.** and Assistant Editor **Jeanine Schaefer**. Both are a little too busy to chat; Tom is putting the finishing touches on the new **TERRA** (so *that's* how she's reknitted to the other Terras), and Jeanine is processing pages for the next SUPERMAN/ BATMAN, arc (I was wondering where the new Metal Men would appear next). I'll just grab some Snickers and be on my way.

Back to Peter. Guess he took becoming the editor of Batman to heart: he now keeps his overhead lights off and door half cracked. Very Batcave-like. Still, I dare to venture inside to see what he's working on. Surprised to find it wasn't Batman or Green Lantern, but the latest **James Robinson** hardcover that sheds light on a very particular year from the early days of the DC Universe. Can't wait to see what he has in store.

Next up, Editor **Joan Hilty**. Now, Joan is probably the most schizophrenic of our editors (and I mean that in the nicest way possible). Not only does Joan edit both DC Universe and Johnny DC titles, but she is also working on a special project for our upstairs cousins in Vertigo. Seems a bit confusing, but as long as Bugs and Tweety don't become members of the Suicide Squad, no one seems to mind. And speaking of Suicide Squad, Joan is finishing an issue of CHECKMATE where they appear to live up to their name. Looks like we have a new widow in the DCU.

Since Joan just waved me out of her office, and her neighbor **Steve Wacker** has his door closed, let me cross the hall again and check in with Assistant Editors **Harvey Richards** and **Rachel Gluckstern**. Harvey is one of the main men behind the scenes of our groundbreaking project **52** and is marking off the days until **52** wraps. Looks like issue 52 comes out on May 2, 2007 (hmm, issue 52 on 5/2– talk about serendipity). And while Harvey supports Steve Wacker (more on him next week) on **52**, Rachel has Joan's back on all the Johnny DC titles and DCU titles she edits. Guess Rachel's only 2/3 schizophrenic.

Would have loved to hit the rest of the offices this week, but we are out of space again. Stick with me next week when we wrap this up.

To be continued.

dan didio

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DC NATION

For a complete list of this week's titles, sneak peeks, breaking news and more, visit us at dccomics.com

THE HOT LIST THIS WEEK

BATMAN #657

BATMAN AND THE MAD MONK #2

52 #21

Next in...

ACTION COMICS #844

Geoff Johns, Adam Kubert and very special friend Richard Donner come aboard as Superman makes his own special friend!

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